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My Blog

How a Close DNA Match Unraveled Both Our Family Mysteries
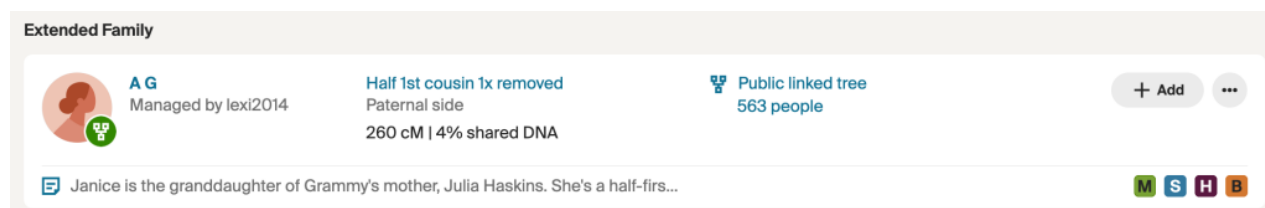

MARJORIE My Grandmother (Daughter of Janice's Grandmother and Janice's half-aunt)

JANICE My half-first cousin, once removed (Granddaughter of Marjorie's Mother and Marjorie's half-niece)

For years, I had a couple of close cousin DNA matches on Ancestry that stood out as intriguing mysteries. This is the story of one of those matches—how it led me to uncover the identity of my grandmother's biological mother, and in turn, helped my DNA match discover her own parentage.
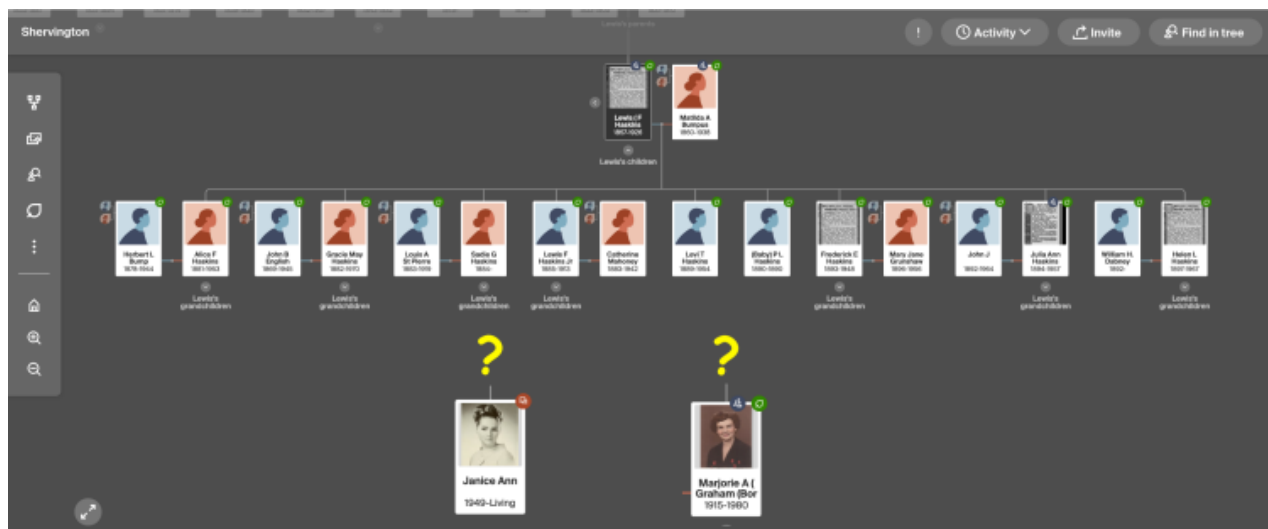
My Highest Shared Extended Family DNA Match

It all started in 2017 when Adrienne (Lexi2014), a friend assisting my DNA match Janice (AG), reached out to me. She had noticed that Janice was my highest extended family match, sharing 260 cM—or about 4%—of DNA. This level of connection typically falls within the range of first cousins, yet neither of us recognized any names in each other's family trees. The reason soon became clear: Janice had been adopted as a baby, and the rumor that my grandmother was also adopted seemed ever more possible. In essence, both of our family trees were missing key information due to these adoptions.

Janice was searching for answers about her biological roots, and at the time, the only clue I could offer was that our shared DNA came from my father's side, whose family originally came from Massachusetts—a coincidence, as Janice happened to be from there as well.

Over the years, we revisited the puzzle, but progress was slow. My grandmother's rumored adoption complicated everything. Then, last year, we got the breakthrough we needed.
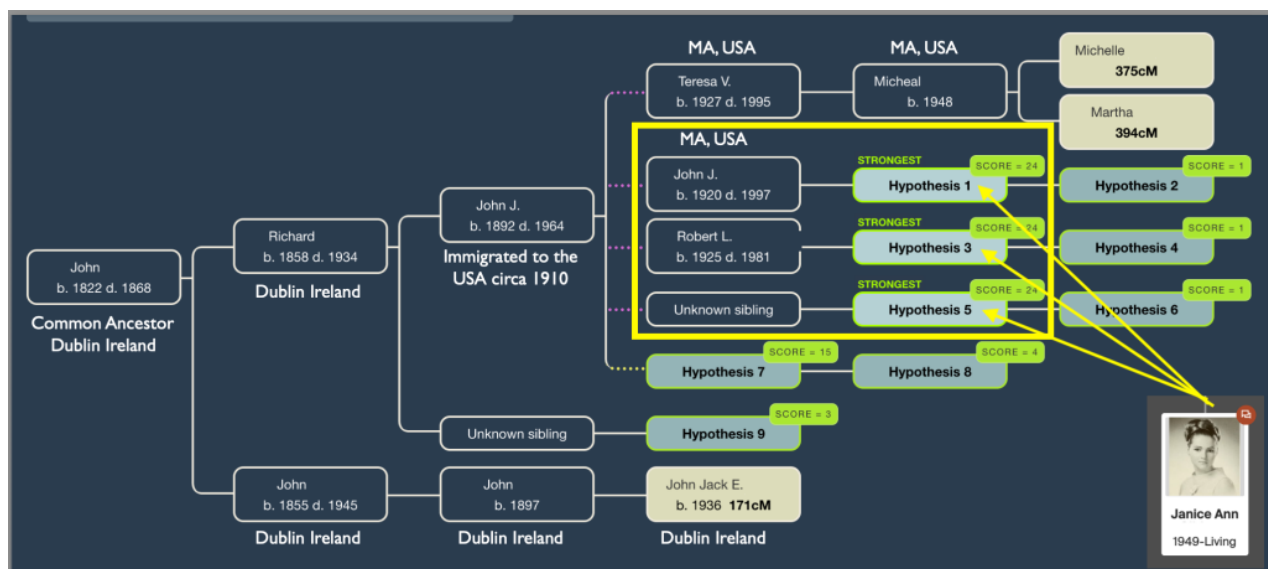
Ancestry released its *shared matches* tool, which allowed us to view people who matched both of us, enabling a triangulation of sorts. Using this, along with a program called *What Are the Odds* (WATO), I determined that Janice and I were both connected to the Haskins and Bumpus families. But with two adoptions involved—hers and my grandmother's—we still didn't know exactly where we each fit in the family tree.

Haskins / Bumpus Family Tree

Fortunately, Janice and Adrienne had already confirmed that Janice's biological mother was Edna, who had since passed away. That narrowed things down to potential paternal connections. The real turning point came when one of Janice's DNA matches in Ireland replied to my message. He shared details about his family's tree and a cousin's immigration to the U.S. in the early 1900s, which helped us significantly refine our research.

Using WATO and the new information, the model suggested that Janice's father was likely one of the two sons of Julia A. Haskins: John or Robert. There was also a possibility that she could be the daughter of a third unknown or unidentified son. So, I turned to historical records—census data, city directories, military service records—to find more clues.

What Are The Odds (WATO) Chart prediction model using a common ancestor and three DNA matches with their relative shared cM.

What I discovered was quite revealing:

- John was seven years older than Janice's mother, lived 50 miles away, and had moved to California around the time Janice would have been conceived.
- Robert lived just seven miles from Janice's mother and was much closer in age— only three years her senior. While Robert resided in a rural area, Janice's mother lived in the nearby commercial center that served the region, creating plenty of chances for their paths to cross.
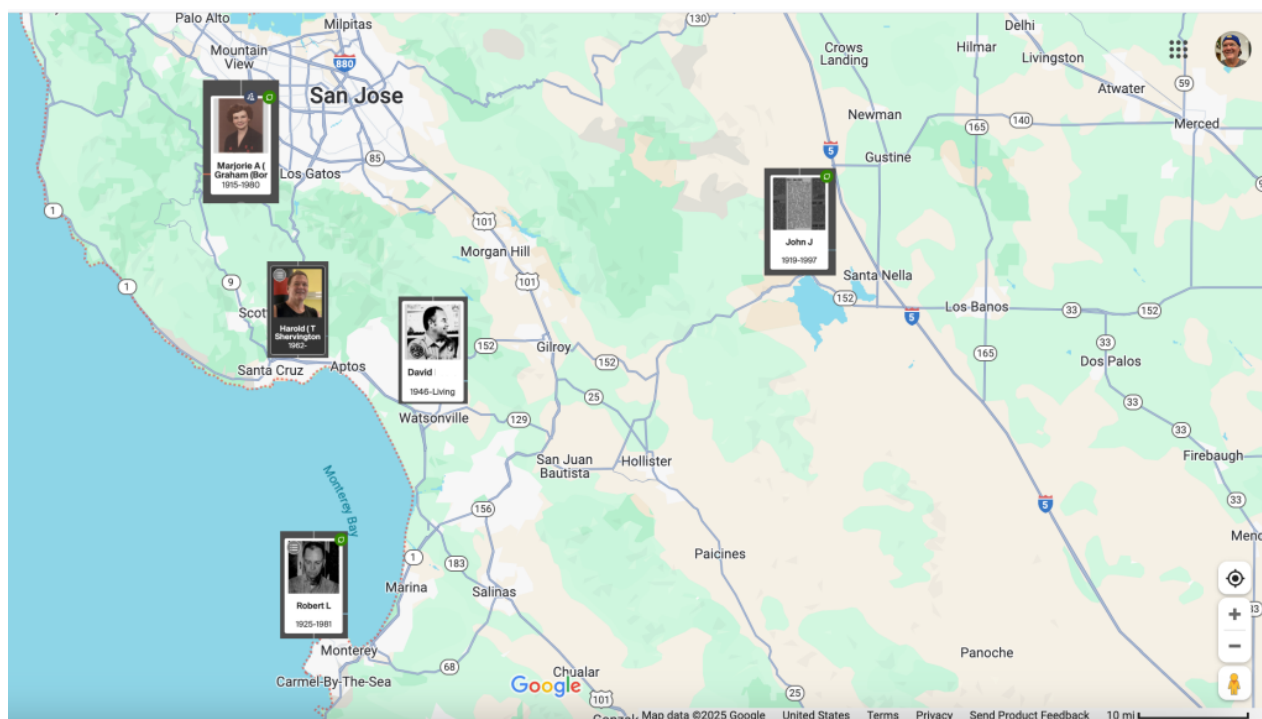- There was no evidence of a third sibling.

Based on all the evidence, I told Janice that Robert appeared to be the most likely candidate to be her father, with John as a less likely possibility. Sadly, both men had already passed away.

Meanwhile, I continued my quest to identify my own great-grandparents. Not long after, a breakthrough came from the Massachusetts Judicial Archive—they located my grandmother's adoption record. It listed her biological mother as **Julia A. Haskins**—Robert's mother and Janice's grandmother. That made Janice and me **half-first cousins once removed**!

You can read more about the discovery of my grandmother's hidden heritage and our connection to the Mayflower here: **[The Mystery of Grammy's Hidden Heritage](#)**.

With both mysteries largely solved, I turned to exploring this branch of the family. John and Robert—my grandmother's half-brothers—had all been born in Wareham, Massachusetts. But incredibly, they had all ended up in **California**.

John settled in Santa Nella with his wife. Robert lived with his family primarily around the Monterey Bay. Unbeknownst to any of us, we had been living within an hour of each other for decades.
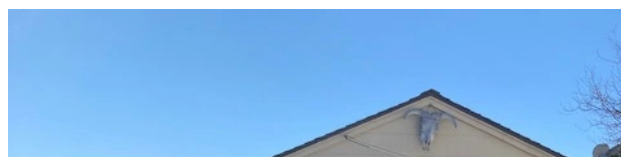
California Bay Area Map

My grandmother passed away in 1980 at the age of 64. Robert followed just a year later in 1981 at 55, and John passed in 1996 at 77. While it's likely that John and Robert remained in contact as brothers, it's doubtful that either of them knew they were living so close to my grandmother—their half-sister—all those years.

Even more surreal is the connection I share with Robert's son, David—my half-first cousin once removed. We both served in the armed forces, pursued careers in law enforcement, and shared a passion for classic cars—restoring them, attending shows, and just enjoying the culture. David is a retired CHP officer, 16 years older than me, but our law enforcement careers actually overlapped in the late '80s and '90s. It's strange to think we may have unknowingly crossed paths while both in uniform. Even off duty, the proximity is uncanny—I lived in Santa Cruz, just a short drive from David's home in Watsonville. David's son Robert lived less than two miles from me in Santa Cruz! I'm almost certain we walked the same streets, strolled the Santa Cruz Boardwalk, or admired the same cars at local shows along the Central Coast.

David, California Highway Patrol Officer (CHP) – My half-first cousin once removed.

David and his classic car.

It's astonishing to think how DNA and a few online tools brought together not just names, but stories, histories, and living relatives—revealing the hidden connections that unknowingly existed in our everyday lives.

👤 **Skip Shervington**   🕐 **April 15, 2025**   📁 **Ancestry Research**
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